

THE ENGLISH LAKES AND WORDSWORTH.

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BY THEO. LEDYARD CUYLER.

"WINDERMERE," exclaims old Christopher North, in one of his impassioned rhapsodies, "is the most beautiful scene upon this earth!" And if, like most of his countrymen, "this earth" with him means the isle of Great Britain, he is no doubt correct, for there is not another spot in the kingdom which equals it in natural beauty. To all those who would visit this enchanting spot aright, the same old poet has said—"Forget as much as may be all worldly cares and anxieties, and let your hearts be open, and free to all the genial impulses about to be breathed into them from the beautiful and sublime in nature."

Imbued in some small degree with this requisite spirit, I set off from Liverpool in company with two most gentlemanly and refined fellow travellers for a short sojourn among the lakes. From Liverpool to Lancaster we went by steam, through a region of collieries, with the air filled with smoke, and the people by the road side as black as the Cyclops. At Lancaster, we stepped on board a canal boat no larger than a cockle shell, which was dragged over the water at the rate of nine miles an hour! to Kendal, where a coach was waiting to convey us to the Lakes. After a short altercation about our places with the impertinent coachman (the only one I met with in all England) we took our inside places, and had a slow, wearisome ride over the mountains.

The darkness of evening was just gathering over the landscape, when we were set down at "The Crown," a tidy little house, on a promontory above the lake, and just on the outskirts of the village of Bowness. Weary and hungry as I was, I could not be enticed into our inviting looking quarters, until I had got a view of the lake, and running up to the top of a mound in the court yard, there—far below me in the bosom of the hills, lay *Windermere*, as placid as a sleeping child. The few stars that broke through the clouds revealed the varied outline of its white surface, over which two or three fishermen's boats were dimly seen, gliding silently to the shore. Just before was a lovely island slumbering on the face of the waters, with many a bower and summer house looking out from amid the dark waving willows that fringed its banks. Were I a poet or a painter, and I am thankful that I am neither, I would ask nothing more than to live and die on Windermere.

For a long time I lingered on the spot where I first caught the enchanting view, and was loath to leave it, even for the delicious supper of lake trout that was steaming on the table within. And a glorious supper was that: its memory still lives on my palate. Oaten cakes, thin, and crisp as a wafer,

fresh mountain butter, silver trout who had sported around the fairy island below us, that very day; while the face of our hostess seemed to say, like old Christopher's "gude woman" of the Highlands—"do oblige us a' sirs, by eatin' as mony eggs as you've a mind to, for our hens are gran' layers."

After a delightful sleep in a room whose thick carpet, heavy curtains, covered bedstead, and well arranged washing appurtenances, afforded a strong contrast to the desolate cells in many of our American houses, we were ready for the next morning's labours. Having heard that Professor Wilson's country seat was in the neighbourhood, we inquired the distance of a boy we met by the road side. "Wilson of Elleray do you mean, sirs?" said he, "it is about a mile and a bit." Let no man trust to guide posts or road side urchins in Scotland or the north of England, for "one mile" means two, and "a bit" means full another; so after three miles of up hill labour, we stood at the gate of Christopher's cottage. The Professor had just gone up to Edinburgh; but it was a pleasure to look up the long walk that led through the firs and laurels to the snug stuccoed mansion with its quiet porch, where the "old man of glee" is wont to sit, and look out upon his favourite Windermere. Had he been at home, we should have been tempted to exercise our *American* privilege, and go in, and "have a crack wi' him" about Wordsworth and the Lakes. We were well repaid for our tiresome walk by the glorious views of Windermere that burst upon us at every turn in our path. When we arrived at our hotel, we were sharpened for another attack upon the oaten cakes and the primrose butter, and then we ordered one of the little boats that were moored in the cove below, and set off for Ambleside at the foot of the lake, about seven miles distant.

The sun was just at his "halfway house" in the heavens when we pushed out into the lake; not one of our July suns, parching man and beast and every blade of grass, but a gentle modest sun, gilding the face of the waters, and making the deep, very deep green of the shores look yet more lovely. As far as the eye could reach down the lake, the low undulating hills sunk to the water's edge, bound with their green ribbons of hedges, and jewelled all over with bright cottages. Just before us on a high promontory stood an immense structure, which we at first took for a ruined abbey or fortress. But on coming near, we found it was "being built" by some ambitious commoner, who is going to doom his family to winding stairways and dark chambers, for the glory of living in a castle of the olden time.

As we passed the spot, a boat pushed out from under the castle, with music on board. This was all that was wanting to fill up the full measure of our enchantment. It was a scene of surpassing loveliness; not merely to the outward eye, but to the inner sense of one who can enjoy the association of poetry and letters.

Far above us, curling up among the hoary oaks and sycamores, arose the smoke of old Christopher's cottage; below him, on the shores of the lake, stood the beautiful mansion of the late learned Bishop Watson of Llandaff; opposite us, nestled in a little copsewood was "Dove's Nest," the cottage of the gifted Hemans; behind Ambleside arose the hill of Rydal, known all the world over as the abode of Wordsworth; beyond him lies Grassmere, the former home of Coleridge; and with a little stretch of the imagination, you may look on to Keswick, where poor Southey died, and where Caroline Bowles still lives. Was not that "glory enough for one day?"

On arriving at Ambleside, we found every house full to overflowing, this being the fashionable season for lake visits, and we were glad to get quarters at "The Salutation" by promising to sleep out in some of the neighbouring cottages, if need be. While they were preparing our trout for us, we walked out into a grove behind the house to see the celebrated waterfall called "Stockgill Force." On arriving at the enclosure surrounding the cascade, we noticed a board posted up to announce to us where "the key could be found!" A key to a waterfall! only think of locking up Niagara! But we got *the key*, however, and after much search up and down the rocks, we at last found the falls, which like every thing else of the kind in England, excited in me (who came from the state of Niagara, Genesee, Trenton and the Cohoes) the most irresistible laughter.

But the great object of interest to me in visiting Ambleside was to see the poet WORDSWORTH, who lives about a mile from the village. While I was walking through the traveller's room of the inn, trying to picture to myself his venerable form, I happened to look out of the window, and espied an old gentleman in a blue cloak and riding cap, with a bunch of heather stuck jauntily in the top, driving by in a little green phaeton towards Rydal. Perhaps, thought I, that is the patriarch himself, and sure enough it was he! I could scarcely believe that the singular old personage before me, was the greatest poet of the age.

The next morning I called upon him. The walk up to his cottage was delightful; with the dew still lingering in the shady nooks by the road side, and the morning songs of thanksgiving bursting forth from every grove of the mountains. At the summit of a deeply shaded hill stands his cottage, covered all over with ivy and woodbine. Just the home for a poet. I was shown at once into his sanctum, where I found him seated with his wife and his books. The old man rose, and received me graciously, and very soon I felt that I was with a

friend. With his appearance I was at first disappointed. Instead of the grave, melancholy man in scholastic black, whom I had expected, I found a most good humoured, affable, loveable old man, dressed in a rough coat of blue with metal buttons, and checked breeches, more like a Virginia farmer than a learned poet. The likeness given in Professor Reed's edition of his works *has been* good, but his face is now longer and thinner, and his white hair falls upon his shoulders. His eyes, which present a singular half closed appearance, betoken the lingering fire which still burns at more than three score and ten. Like his own *Solitary*—

"Plain was his garb;
Such as might suit a rustic sire, prepared
For Sabbath duties; yet he was a man
Whom no one could have passed without remark.
His limbs and his whole figure breathed intelligence.
Time had compressed the freshness of his cheek
Into a narrow circle of deep red,
But had not tamed his eye; that, under brows
Shaggy and gray, had meanings which it brought
From years of youth; which like a Being made
From many Beings, he had wondrous skill
To blend with knowledge of the years to come
Human, or such as lie beyond the grave."

We entered at once into a delightful conversation, in which he displayed all the simplicity, eloquence and earnestness which belong to his noble, and yet childlike character. He talked of the literary men of our country, and spoke of America with the highest respect. He had at one time hoped to visit us, but the duties of a small office which he held (Distributor of Stamps) and upon which he was dependent, prevented the undertaking. Now he is bound by the infirmities of age, for the short remainder of his life, to his mountain home. He occasionally makes a trip to London to see the few survivors of his early days, but he told me that his late excursion there, had proved a laborious and wearisome effort.

His library was small, but select, and he showed me with great pleasure a beautifully bound volume of the American edition of his works, sent to him by Professor Henry Reed. He told me that Mr. Murray had never produced an edition that suited him as well.

When I looked around his quiet little room, I could scarcely realize that those walls had heard the elevated converse of some of the loftiest minds our age has produced; that there Sir Walter had doled forth his snatches of Border minstrelsy, and Southey had rehearsed the beautiful fables of Persian mythology, and Coleridge had poured out long harangues about Goethe and Schiller, the Samothracian mysteries, and the libraries of Alexandria. When I was about leaving, the poet got his broad white hat, and put on his double glasses (to protect his failing eyes) and insisted on showing me his grounds, and the neighbouring views. As we walked about from one commanding point to ano-

ther, he kept up the most lively conversation, and displayed such a winning familiarity that we seemed

"A pair of friends—though I was young,
And he was seventy-four."

From the rear of his courtyard he showed me Rydal Water, a little lake about a mile long, environed by bold, towering hills. In front, over the steeple of the parish church, you see *Grassmere*, another of the cluster of lakes which abound in the county of Cumberland. Beyond is Helvellyn, the

mountain king, with his retinue of a hundred hills, and at his feet lies Derwentwater—and ROBERT SOUTHEY.

I might have spent the whole day in delightful and improving intercourse with the old man, but my fellow travellers were waiting, and I could no longer intrude on his or their time. When we returned to the door of his cottage, he bade me farewell with a parting blessing, and I went on my way, rejoicing to have seen before he goes hence, the most gifted of Nature's interpreters.